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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PBTS](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: NINEWA GOVERNOR TESTS FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT,  
ENCOUNTERS KURDISH RESISTANCE

REF: BAGHDAD 271

Classified By: A/DCM Gary A. Grappo for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (S/NF) SUMMARY: As the first test of the newly operational tripartite Combined Security Mechanisms (CSM) in northern Iraq, Ninewa Provincial Governor Atheel al-Nujaifi - whose freedom of movement in Kurdish-controlled areas of Ninewa has been circumscribed since he took office in 2009 - visited two towns in Kurdish-controlled Tel Kayf, a district within the disputed internal boundary (DIBs) areas. Kurdish leaders denied the request to visit (they later acceded after high-level U.S. intervention and modification of the itinerary), obstructed al-Nujaifi's freedom of movement, and appeared to have actively coordinated violent demonstrations along the route. Al-Nujaifi's convoy, escorted by U.S. and Iraqi forces (USF and ISF), was delayed at checkpoints, pelted with rocks and produce, and at one point came under scattered small arms fire (there were no reported casualties). According to U.S. Forces - Iraq (USF-I) commanders, discipline among Kurdish peshmerga forces was less than what it should have been. In televised interviews on February 1 and 2, al-Nujaifi claimed he had been the subject of an "assassination attempt". KRG officials in turn claimed that local populations had demonstrated to protest al-Nujaifi's travel to their communities. Senior Embassy and USF-I leaders engaged senior KRG and GOI interlocutors on February 2 to urge that they refrain from inflammatory media statements, abide by the terms of the CSM and underscore that implementation of the CSM is an iterative process that will have to be worked through. Engagement of senior KRG and GOI leaders by Embassy and USF-I officials continues. While al-Nujaifi was clearly seeking to provoke a response, the Kurdish peshmerga's lack of discipline and provocative actions came dangerously close to costing lives (and could well have but for the restraint and professionalism of ISF and USF). Al-Nujaifi was ultimately able to visit two towns within the DIBs area of Ninewa to which he was unable to travel just three days ago; however, this initial test of the CSM architecture was inauspicious. The events of February 1 exposed prevailing mistrust between GOI and KRG actors, required high-level U.S. intervention and suggested that considerable work is needed to further clarify the CSM protocols and reinforce to senior KRG and GOI leaders the serious political equities associated with the CSM architecture. END SUMMARY.

TESTING THE WATERS  
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12. (S) On January 31, the day initial operating capability was achieved on the CSM) across the disputed internal boundary (DIBs) areas of northern Iraq (reftel), Ninewa Provincial Governor Atheel al-Nujaifi's personal security

detail (PSD) notified the Ninewa Combined Coordination Center (NCCC) that al-Nujaifi intended to travel on February 1 to Tel Kayf and al-Qosh. Both towns are located in DIBs areas of Tel Kayf district in north central Ninewa. Tel Kayf is in a Combined Security Area (CSA) governed by CSM protocols; al-Qosh is outside the CSA. (Note: Al-Nujaifi told USF and PRT leaders in Ninewa several weeks ago that he intended to test the freedom of movement provisions of the CSM early. Our understanding was that he would first send his PSD to test coordination and travel mechanisms. End note.) Kurdish liaison officers at the NCCC denied al-Nujaifi's request to

travel to al-Qosh, saying Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Barzani's express permission was needed. Barzani was outside the country and more time would be needed to secure his permission. Since the NCCC was unable to resolve the issue, it referred it to the Senior Working Group Coordination Center (SWGCC) in accordance with CSM protocol.

13. (S) Late on January 31, USF-I commanders contacted al-Nujaifi to ask if he would drop al-Qosh from his itinerary. He agreed to do so. In parallel, USF-I commanders made multiple attempts to convince KRG leaders to allow al-Nujaifi to travel to Tel Kayf in accordance with the freedom of movement envisioned in the CSM. There was no resolution in discussions with KRG leaders, who either denied the request or said a "national decision" by more senior KRG officials was needed. In absence of a decision from the KRG, USF-I, with ISF participation, decided to support al-Nujaifi's request to travel to Tel Kayf and, as a substitute for al-Qosh, to nearby Wana, a town in western Tel Kayf district also located in a Ninewa CSA.

ACTION ...

14. (S/NF) Early on February 1, the NCCC notified all personnel of al-Nujaifi's planned movement to Tel Kayf and Wana. Peshmerga at three unilateral checkpoints just outside al-Qosh prevented Tel Kayf's Mayor, Bassim Bello, from traveling from his home in al-Qosh to Tel Kayf to meet with al-Nujaifi. Bello said the peshmerga and asayish treated him rudely, told him they were acting under orders and said they had imposed a curfew on Tel Kayf District. After lengthy discussions and intervention by PRT Ninewa through the KRG liaison to the Ninewa Operations Center (NiOC), Bello managed to leave al-Qosh, navigate the peshmerga and asayish checkpoints and reach his office in Tel Kayf.

... AND REACTION

15. (S) Al-Nujaifi and his PSD, including Iraqi Security Forces, rendezvoused with USF (including the local U.S. battalion and brigade commanders) and traveled together to a peshmerga checkpoint on the edge of Tel Kayf town. Peshmerga forces prevented the convoy from passing through the checkpoint. Negotiations between the U.S. brigade commander and peshmerga leaders (all wearing peshmerga general officer rank insignia) ensued and a crowd of 300-plus individuals, mostly young men holding sticks, formed. A large KRG flag was stretched across the road and peshmerga brandished crew-served machine guns and rocket propelled grenades. Peshmerga leaders told the U.S. brigade commander that al-Nujaifi and ISF would not be allowed to enter Tel Kayf, and that a battalion from the 3rd Peshmerga Brigade had reinforced Tel Kayf the night of January 31 to help ensure that. (Note: Reinforcing Tel Kayf without notifying the NCCC contravened CSM protocols. End note.)

16. (S) After a series of telephone conversations with the NCCC, the senior peshmerga officer at the NCCC conveyed agreement for al-Nujaifi to enter Tel Kayf town. Despite that, a flyover by U.S. aircraft, maneuvers by U.S. tanks and smoke grenades were needed to disperse the crowd, which blocked the road. As the crowd scattered, it threw rocks and refuse at the convoy, damaging vehicles. Al-Nujaifi was able

to enter Tel Kayf town, where he met with Mayor Bello in his office. The residents of Tel Kayf in the vicinity of municipal offices were pleasant in their interactions with ISF and USF soldiers providing perimeter security for al-Nujaifi. (Note: Suggesting the peshmerga may have brought in the hostile crowd that confronted the convoy at the checkpoint outside of Tel Kayf. End note.)

¶7. (S) Following the meeting with Nujaifi, Mayor Bello returned to his home in al-Qosh without incident. Governor al-Nujaifi traveled from Tel Kayf to Wana for a meeting with the Wana sub-district mayor. On the outskirts of Wana, unidentified individuals directed small arms fire against al-Nujaifi's convoy. Iraqi Security Forces arrested a number of military-aged males attempting to throw rocks and other objects at the convoy. (Note: Al-Nujaifi's chief of staff said six were arrested; Kurdish representatives at the NCCC claim 10 were detained and some KRG sources characterized the detainees as kidnap victims. They are to appear in court on February 3. End note.) After meeting with Wana's sub-district mayor, al-Nujaifi's convoy returned to Mosul without further incident.

#### MAKING POLITICAL HAY

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¶8. (S) Al-Nujaifi subsequently gave televised interviews on February 1 to al-Jazeera and al-Mosulia television channels, claiming he was the victim of an attempted assassination during his travel to Tel Kayf and Wana. GEN Odierno, USF-I Commanding General (CG), sent a note to KRG PM Salih on February 2, urging restraint and underscoring the expectation that the KRG would abide by the terms of the CSMs. Ninewa PRT Team Leader (TL) spoke with al-Nujaifi by phone twice on February 2. He underscored the U.S. commitment to al-Nujaifi's freedom of movement and the CSM, conveyed that we were engaging senior KRG leaders, urged al-Nujaifi to refrain from inflammatory media statements, and noted that despite the difficult circumstances, al-Nujaifi was able to visit and have meetings in a part of the province to which he had been unable to travel just a few days ago. (Note: PRT TL and USD North Deputy CG will meet with al-Nujaifi on February 13. End note.) Embassy expressed similar concerns to GOI officials.

¶9. (S) Al-Nujaifi was determined and confident in his conversation with PRT TL. He thanked the USF for their professionalism, commended ISF elements, described his meetings in Tel Kayf and Wana as productive, agreed his freedom of movement had been protected, said he will conduct similar movements in the near future and will coordinate those with the CCC, and agreed to tone down his rhetoric "if the Kurds toned down theirs first". He asked that Ambassador and USF-I CG take the following steps: 1) inform KRG leaders that their "assassination attempt" (sic) against him was inconsistent with their professed commitment to democracy and freedom, and 2) recognize that his convoy encountered checkpoints beyond the CCPs that were "clearly independent Pesh checkpoints" that violated the CSM. DPM Issawi, who had just spoken with al-Nujaifi, told PolCouns on February 2 that al-Nujaifi was "calm" because of his understanding that the Embassy and USF were actively engaging the KRG to secure adherence to the CSM.

¶10. (S/NF) COMMENT: Our information is al-Nujaifi was not/not targeted for assassination. According to USF-I commanders, command and control of and discipline among Kurdish peshmerga forces was less than what it should have been. The peshmerga did not participate with USF and ISF in facilitating freedom of movement as envisioned under the tripartite CSA, sent additional reinforcements into DIBs areas in anticipation of the PGOV's travel, did not use the CCC to coordinate (but rather as an information gathering mechanism), and actively participated in efforts to agitate the crowds and prevent USF from facilitating al-Nujaifi's freedom of movement. This first test of freedom of movement under the CSM was bumpy, underscoring that further work is needed to clarify the CSM

protocols for all partners and to reinforce to senior KRG and  
GOI leaders the serious political equities associated with  
the CSM architecture. END COMMENT.  
HILL